

International Talks on Global Warming FAQ

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

November 28-December 9

What is happening in Montreal these two weeks?

Nations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and others will meet for the 11th Conference of the Parties (COP-11) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC). Also, the nations that have ratified the Kyoto Protocol will meet. The meetings last two full weeks, from November 28 until December 9, and are hosted by the Canadian government.

What is the significance of the Montreal meetings?

These meetings are very important for a number of reasons:

- Countries will be discussing what will happen after the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol ends in 2012.
- A clear process for multi-year negotiations needs to be established so that the negotiations can be completed in a timely manner, add confidence to newly formed “carbon markets,” and continue political momentum.
- Failure to reach agreement on discussions for future reduction commitments that involve a broader set of countries would be a tremendous setback to reduce global warming pollution. Key issues are what is appropriate for developing countries to undertake, and whether progress can be made absent the U.S. being willing to adopt binding international commitments.

What is the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change?

The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), also known as the “Convention,” is the initial international treaty on climate change that was adopted at the “Rio Earth Summit” in 1992. Compared to the Kyoto Protocol, there are more ratifying countries, including the United States.

What is the connection between the Kyoto Protocol and the UNFCCC?

The Kyoto Protocol is a subsidiary protocol to the Convention. It was negotiated in 1997 when it was recognized that the Convention’s non-binding emissions targets were proving ineffective. The Protocol shares the Convention’s objective, principles and institutions, but significantly strengthens the Convention by committing some nations to individual, legally-binding targets to limit or reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. Ratified by 141 nations, with the notable absence of the U.S. and Australia, the Protocol entered into force in February 2005.

If the US hasn’t ratified the Kyoto Protocol, what role do American officials have at these meetings?

Not having ratified the Kyoto Protocol, the US can only participate as an observer in those sessions. The status includes speaking rights but not the ability to block decision making.

A visible presence in Montreal by US elected officials, including mayors, is important to signal to the Kyoto nations and developing countries that the US is engaged, that Americans do recognize the threat of global warming and that they are fully committed to both pressing for federal leadership and to taking action to reduce global warming pollution in their own communities.